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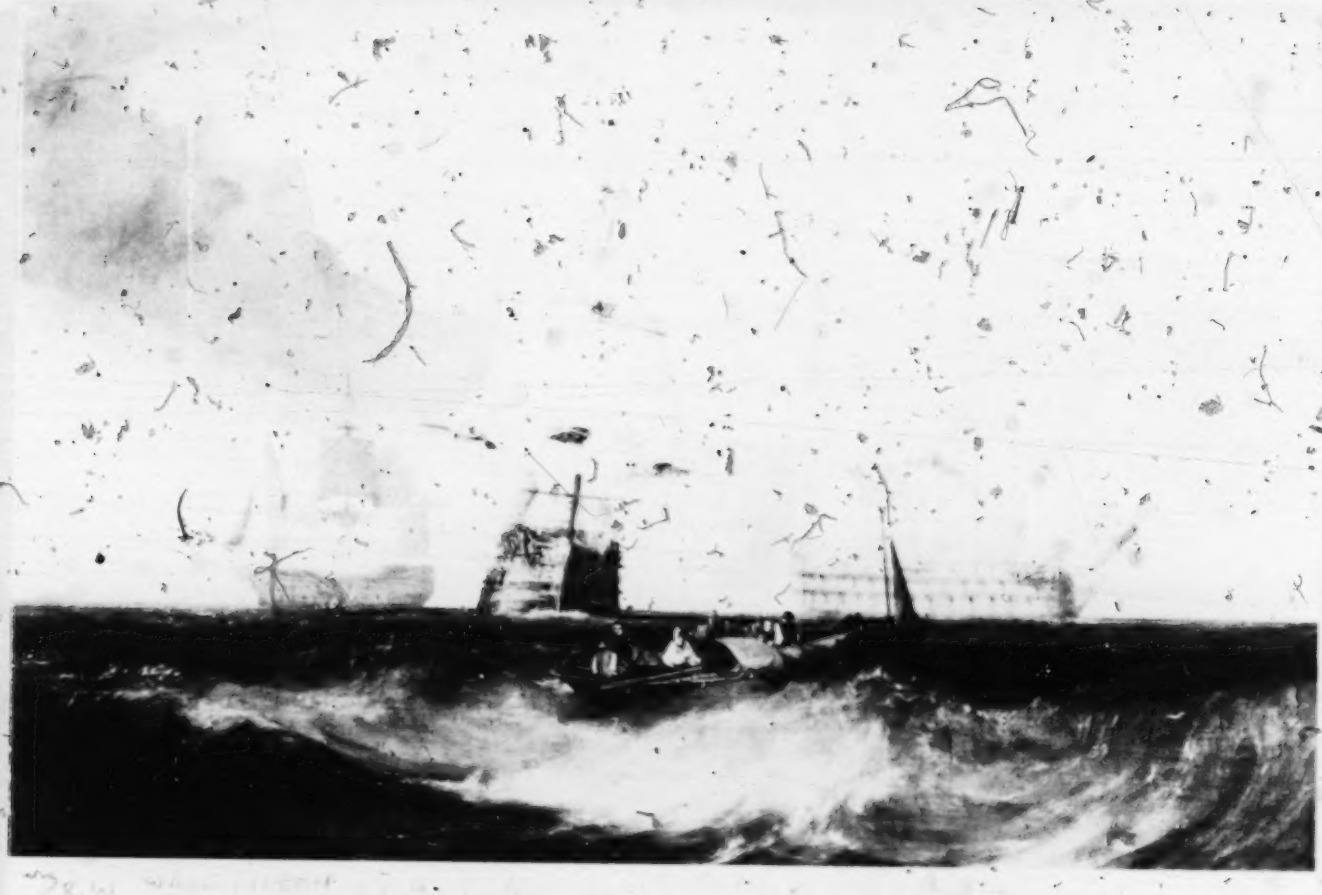


J. M. W. TURNER

A Selection of Paintings from the

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

LIBRARY

J. M. W. TURNER

A Selection of Paintings

from the Collection of

MR. AND MRS. PAUL MELLON

October 31, 1968 - April 21, 1969

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON, D. C.

INTRODUCTION

Paul Mellon, the President of the National Gallery, has been collecting British paintings for many years. From the superb works of art he has assembled the Gallery will hold a series of exhibitions, of which this is the first. Others will follow for the next several years at six-month intervals. The present show is devoted to the oil paintings of Joseph Mallord William Turner; it will be succeeded in the spring by an exhibition of the work of John Constable. All the exhibitions will have catalogues similar to this, and it is hoped that together these will afford a useful and interesting survey of painting in Great Britain.

To be able to mount such one-man shows indicates the size and comprehensiveness of the Paul Mellon Collection, which now rivals that of the Tate Gallery, the British national collection. Few private collectors can have brought together so many works of a single school. There are in the collection over 1,000 oil paintings and over 3,000 water colors and drawings. These provide a panorama of three centuries of art in Great Britain: portraits, landscapes, marine pictures, genre and conversation pieces, hunting and racing scenes.

In 1966 it was announced that Mr. Mellon had decided to give this vast collection to Yale University. To house his gift of paintings and illustrated books, he is also planning to erect and endow a building which besides exhibition galleries will contain an art library, lecture hall, and seminar rooms. At the time of the announcement Mr. Mellon said: "It seems to me that Yale, with its great holdings in British literary and social research materials, such as the Walpole and Boswell papers, could make

the best use of the resources of my collections for educational and historical purposes. . . . It was at Yale as an undergraduate that my personal interest in English literature and art began in earnest, and I've always been deeply grateful to the University for this fact." As it will be some time before the Paul Mellon Center for British Art and British Studies is built, Mr. Mellon has agreed to allow a number of his paintings to be seen here before they are sent to New Haven.

The British school of painting has not received, especially in recent years, the recognition it deserves. The explanation is complex, but several reasons can be suggested. There have been few if any collections of British painting on the continent. Consequently, continental scholars for the most part have ignored British art.

Their indifference has been matched by the apologetic attitude of English critics. Roger Fry and Clive Bell, for example, spent much of their energies fighting to gain acceptance for the School of Paris, whose aesthetic theories, as they pointed out, were totally at variance with the tradition of English painting. Even Herbert Read, another important English critic, devoted virtually none of his voluminous writing to British painting, except for contemporary artists. Thus the study of the British school until the last few years attracted few distinguished writers.

Another reason for the neglect of British painting was the low repute of the Royal Academy. In the 1920's and 1930's it was an institution rejected by many of the best British painters. Their denigration of academic painting was prejudicial to earlier Academicians. Yet these were the men responsible for many of the greatest achievements of British art.

There was also a reaction against Edwardian taste, against the excessive vogue at the turn of this century for Reynolds, Gainsborough, Romney, Hoppner, and Lawrence. Too many of their mechanical and repetitive half-length and full-length social portraits, their least interesting work, were purchased indiscriminately by Americans to decorate pseudo-Georgian houses. During the depression years a shift in fashion occurred, followed by a spectacular decline in the inflated values of these British portraitists.

All these factors led to an indifference to British painting as a whole, which is just ending. Paul Mellon is to a great extent responsible for this change. The exhibitions of his paintings in the Virginia Museum of Fine

Arts in Richmond, the Royal Academy in London, and the Yale Art Gallery in New Haven focused attention on many artists who had been ignored by collectors and dealers. Lovers of painting began to realize that all English art was not executed in the Grand Manner. They began to appreciate the virtues of the lesser known English masters: Zoffany, Devis, and the innumerable other artists who brilliantly recorded life in England two hundred years ago. These painters of conversation pieces and genre scenes, these illustrators of rural life in Great Britain and in the colonies, are among the true glories of the Paul Mellon Collection.

Moreover, the Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art, in London, has been established to stimulate a younger generation of art historians to study and publish the work of many neglected British painters. Though the National Gallery of Art exhibitions begin with the two most famous British artists who have never been out of fashion, Turner and Constable, subsequent shows will be devoted to less celebrated painters. Thus we hope to indicate the wealth of talent, English and Scottish, that has been overlooked by several generations of connoisseurs. A revived appreciation of British painting has just begun. The next few years, one might predict, will witness a significant shift in aesthetic values.

JOHN WALKER
Director

Washington, D.C.
September 1968

THERE WILL BE FEW TO DISPUTE that Turner is the greatest English painter, and in a century which began with Goya and ended with Cézanne he has an assured place among the giants. Turner is also one of the few English artists whose originality and genius are now generally recognized even outside of the English-speaking world. In both the media he practiced he was a supreme master. Undoubtedly the finest watercolorist England, and probably the entire world, has produced, he explored the possibilities of the medium with a daring and inventiveness that had been undreamt of before and have never been equalled since. In the field of oil painting Turner was equally bold and few artists have taken such liberties with paint; in his pursuit of light and color he reached limits only exceeded in our own day.

Many of his contemporaries, fellow-artists and connoisseurs, found his work baffling and even outrageous. This made Turner, who was always a reserved man, except with his closest friends, disillusioned and even more shut in on himself, and his later works were painted for his own satisfaction and not with a public in mind. Nevertheless, he always had his supporters, and younger artists were enthusiastic admirers: Constable, the only other English landscape painter who can be compared to Turner, said of the *Dort or Dordrecht* (cat. no. 10) "I think the most complete work of genius I ever saw." Lawrence was one of his first and most steadfast supporters and the more perceptive patrons were willing to pay the high prices Turner charged. He became very rich, but was not the miserly and squalid old man legend has sometimes suggested. On the

contrary, one of his dearest wishes was to set up almshouses for indigent artists, but his will was upset and the money went to undeserving and greedy relatives.

Turner's output was prodigious. In a working lifetime of nearly sixty years he produced hundreds of oil paintings and thousands of drawings. He was a dedicated and single minded artist for whom painting was the chief thing in life and he allowed nothing to distract him from it. His pictures were "his children", and their creation, with its attendant effort and joy, was like the pain and pleasure of childbirth. In such a vast number of paintings it is not surprising that quality varies. Figures were never his strong point and not all his experiments were successful. This is partly because some of his colors have faded, and it may be that the criticism of Sir George Beaumont, a powerful connoisseur of the day, was to some extent justified when he complained that "much harm has been done by endeavouring to make painting in oil to appear like watercolors, by which, in attempting to give lightness and clearness the force of oil painting has been lost" It was as a watercolorist that Turner was trained, and he continued to use sketches in watercolor for first ideas and to capture the transitory light and mood of sky or sea for which the medium is so suited. The early drawings are in the tradition of the 18th century topographical school. From first hand reports we learn that Turner scratched and rubbed the paper in a frenzy of activity until he achieved the desired effect. We know nothing of his training as a painter in oils; he may well have been largely self-taught. Depending on the subject matter of his paintings he was influenced by different masters. *Port Ruysdael* (cat. no. 11) tells us of Turner's admiration for the 17th century Dutch school of landscape painters and the *Dort or Dordrecht* (cat. no. 10) is a reworking of Cuyp without being in any way a pastiche. Gainsborough and Constable also turned to Dutch painting as a source of style. Perhaps the constantly changing skies over both countries created a similar interest and response. The clouds, mists and rains of England inspired artists to catch the varied moods and lights of the landscape and the sky. The English weather is seldom still; there is nearly always wind, and we feel this movement in Turner's paintings where the clouds scud across the sky, or the waves break against the boats and ships as in *The Junction of the Thames and the Medway* (Gallery 57). The ever-changing face of the English coun-

tryside demands to be painted. It cannot be an accident that only there has a school of landscape painting grown up which continues to flourish to our own day. Mood and light are never constant: a cloud obscures the sun, and the greys and browns predominate; the sun comes out, and the innumerable shades of green, which always impress the visitor, return. Of the two founders of the British landscape school it was Wilson rather than Gainsborough who influenced the young Turner (*Harlech Castle* cat. no. 3). Through Wilson he came to the 17th century classical tradition of Italy, and above all Claude Lorrain. We think of Turner as a Romantic artist and this is true, provided we remember that like Delacroix he is too great to be stereotyped and frequently painted subjects with classical themes. Claude's serene landscapes, bathed in golden or silver light, depicting mythological scenes in an idealized setting, were greatly admired by Turner and he stipulated in his will that two of his paintings should hang next to two Claudes in the National Gallery, London. *Aeneas and the Cumæan Sibyl* (cat. no. 7) is very Claudean in subject and style: in the carefully composed arrangement of foreground, middle distance and background, and the placid water of the lake reflecting the calm mood of the picture. Claude and Wilson were both deeply influenced by the landscape around Rome, the Campagna, and there is the curious paradox that the classical or first generation of English landscape painters owed so much, directly or at second hand, to Italy. The second generation, already tinged with Romanticism, often found the journey through Switzerland an even greater stimulus to their development than Italy which was their goal. Turner was a man of his age. He responded to the grandeur of the Alps and the immensity of Nature revealed in glaciers and avalanches, but as a student of light he could not fail to be influenced by the sunshine of the Mediterranean which has such an attraction for the traveller from the sunless north. However it was not Rome or Naples that monopolized his attention, but Venice, and in this he was a forerunner of so many 19th century artists: Monet, Whistler, Ruskin. Perhaps only northern eyes can adequately capture the magic of that city which appeared to those artists to float on the waters, where pink and white marble palaces and churches dissolved in a misty atmosphere and were reflected in the still waters of the canals (for of course only the slow glide of the gondolas broke their surface), a city which defied reason and seemed a

creation of enchantment. The radiance of the sun rising through the mist or shining on the water was something Turner could capture in his watercolors, which can record the transitory and the evanescent. His style changed as a result, achieving a new luminosity and subtlety. In oils this could not always be matched, and some lack the sparkle and ethereal beauty of the watercolors. Yet where he is successful, as in *Approach to Venice* and *The Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute* in Gallery 61, the effect is magical, the buildings shimmer in the soft atmosphere and we are carried into a world of illusion and fantasy. And the failures of technique are justified by the supreme achievements of the late years of which the most famous are the *Snow Storm* (1842) and *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844) in the National Gallery, London, where forms have dissolved into almost pure color and light.

It is often said that Turner was an Impressionist before his time, but this is to misunderstand his aims and it does scant justice to his originality to suggest he was the unwitting precursor of a movement he knew nothing of. Manet and Pissarro admired Turner when they were living in London, but they had already formulated their ideas, and their approach was more scientific, whereas Turner's was Romantic and emotional.

ROSS WATSON

JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER

1775	23rd April, born in London the son of a barber.
1789	Entered the Royal Academy Schools for 4 years, and at about the same time studied under Thomas Malton, the topographical watercolorist.
1790	First exhibit at the Royal Academy, a watercolor.
c.1794	Spent Winter evenings for three years at Dr. Thomas Monro's, copying drawings by John Robert Cozens, the greatest watercolorist of that time. Girtin was also there.
1796	Exhibited first oil painting at the Royal Academy.
1799	Elected Associate of the Royal Academy.
1802	Elected full member of the Royal Academy. First visit abroad, to France and Switzerland, having already been on almost annual sketching tours of Great Britain to gather topographical material, most of which was engraved.
1817	Resumed visits abroad, interrupted by the Napoleonic Wars, and he travelled frequently in France, the Low Countries, the Rhineland, Switzerland or Italy until 1845.
1819	First visit to Italy: Venice, Rome, Naples.
1843	Publication of the first volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, largely a vindication of Turner.
1851	19th December, died in Chelsea, London.

Catalogue of the Exhibition

NOTES

For convenience, where a painting has been exhibited, only the last exhibition is given.

The three major exhibitions of the English paintings from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon were:

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, 1963 (abbreviated to *Richmond*)

Royal Academy, London, Winter Exhibition, 1964-65 (abbreviated to *R. A.*)

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, 1965 (abbreviated to *Yale*)

Where no exact date exists for a painting the dating of the previous catalogues compiled by Mr. Basil Taylor has been followed. Mr. Jonathan Mayne has provided the dating for no. 13.

1. BATH ABBEY, WEST FRONT c.1797

Oil on canvas, 42 x 50 in. (106.5 x 127 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Turner Centennial Exhibition*, Art Gallery of Toronto 1951 (1)

This must be related to the watercolor of the same subject exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1796 (715) and is consequently one of Turner's earliest oil paintings. He had made a sketch during his visit to Bath in 1791. The style is still close to traditional topographical views.

2. THE LIME KILN AT COALBROOKDALE c.1797-98

Oil on panel, 11⅜ x 15⅞ in. (29 x 37.75 cm.)

NOT PREVIOUSLY EXHIBITED

Coalbrookdale, Shropshire was one of the early centers of the Industrial Revolution in England and was famous for its iron works. Turner was in Shropshire in 1794, but this painting must date from a few years later when he began to exhibit oils. The subject matter and lighting may owe something to Wright of Derby who specialized in industrial scenes and was fascinated by unusual light effects. The dramatic contrasts of light and dark are reminiscent of DeLoutherbourg, an artist who worked for the theatre.

3. HARLECH CASTLE 1799

Oil on canvas, 34½ x 47 in. (87 x 119.5 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (200)

Turner was in Wales in 1798 and exhibited *Harlech Castle* at the Royal Academy in 1799 (192). The composition is strongly influenced by Richard Wilson, one of the founders of the British landscape school, especially in the device of the foreground rocks rising out of the picture plane, and the calm idyllic mood.

4. TUMMEL BRIDGE, PERTHSHIRE c.1802-5

Oil on panel, 11 x 18¼ in. (28 x 46.5 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (193)

The dark tonality of this delightful little painting suggests an early dating. The artist was in Scotland on a sketching tour in 1801. It must be one of the first examples of Scottish landscape to be painted: until then the rugged scenery of the north had been ignored. The interest in mountains is of course an important aspect of Romanticism.

5. THE VICTORY RETURNING FROM TRAFALGAR c.1806

Oil on canvas, 26⅜ x 39½ in. (67 x 75 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (195)

Turner exhibited an unfinished *Battle of Trafalgar* in his own gallery in 1806. It is very likely that this painting belongs to the same period when national pride in Nelson's great naval victory of the previous year was very strong. Walter Fawkes of Farnley Hall, to whom the painting originally belonged, was an important patron of Turner's, as well as a close friend.

6. NEWARK ABBEY 1807

Oil on canvas, 36 x 48½ in. (91.5 x 123 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (199)

Newark Abbey on the Wye, which runs into the Thames between London and Windsor, was sketched several times by Turner. The drawing for this picture was made in 1806-07 and the oil exhibited in Turner's own gallery in 1807. It was painted for Sir John Leicester, later Lord de Tabley who had a fine collection of Turner's work. Another owner was the portrait painter Sir Thomas Lawrence. The somber colors hark back to 17th century Dutch landscape painting.

7. LAKE AVERNUS: AENEAS AND THE CUMÆAN SIBYL c.1813-15

Oil on canvas, 28¼ x 38¼ in. (72 x 97 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (198)

Although Turner had not yet been to Italy when this was painted, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, who bought the painting, provided him with a sketch of the scene near Naples which he had made on the spot. Turner's great admiration for Claude Lorrain is evident in the careful construction of the different planes, and the choice of a subject also used by the older master. Aeneas, the legendary founder of Rome, consulted the Cumæan Sibyl before descending to Hades, through an entrance near Lake Avernus.

8. MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE WITH LAKE AND FIGURES c.1820-25

Oil on canvas, 26 x 24½ in. (40.5 x 62 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Richmond* (135)

An unusual work for Turner unrelated to other paintings. It has the mood of a pastorale.

9. THE SKETCH FOR THE ABOVE PAINTING c.1820-25

Oil on board, 7⅝ x 11⅝ in. (19.5 x 29.5 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Richmond* (139h)

10. DORT OR DORDRECHT: THE DORT PACKET-BOAT FROM ROTTERDAM BECALMED 1818

Oil on canvas, 62 x 92 in. (157.5 x 233 cm.)

LAST EXHIBITED: *Turner*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1953 (79)

This justly celebrated masterpiece was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1818 (166) and became part of the Farnley Hall collection (see cat. no.5). The

inspiration, as the title gives away, is Cuyp, probably such a painting as *The Maas at Dordrecht*, now hanging in Gallery 47, which Turner could have seen in England. Both artists were fascinated by aerial perspective. Constable was probably speaking about this painting when he said "I think the most complete work of genius I ever saw."

11. PORT RUYSDAEL 1827

Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 48¼ in. (92 x 122.5 cm.)
LAST EXHIBITED: *R. A.* (168)

Another great 17th century Dutch landscape painter is commemorated in the title—which is fictitious—as an act of homage to Ruisdael whom Turner had admired during his visit to Paris in 1802. A number of other artists were similarly commemorated in the titles of paintings. *Port Ruysdael* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1827 (147).

12. THE BURNING OF THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT 1834

Oil on panel, 5½ x 7½ in. (14 x 19 cm.)
LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (194)

On the 16th of October 1834 the old Houses of Parliament were destroyed by fire and Turner made a number of sketches on the spot. The present oil sketch was probably done in his studio for the finished paintings now in Cleveland and Philadelphia. An oil sketch by Constable of the fire is also in the Mellon collection.

13. RIVER LANDSCAPE WITH A CASTLE c.1838-42

Oil on canvas, 33¾ x 44¼ in. (85.5 x 112.5 cm.)
NOT PREVIOUSLY EXHIBITED

The scene may be a French river or possibly on the Rhine, and has so far escaped identification.

14. MONTE ROSA c.1840

Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in. (91.5 x 122 cm.)
LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (197)

The lake in the foreground is Lago Maggiore. Turner passed through the Dolomites on his way to Venice in 1840 and the misty colors blending into each other are typical of his late style.

15. STORMY SEA BREAKING ON A SHORE c.1840

Oil on canvas, 17½ x 25 in. (44.5 x 63.5 cm.)
LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (192)

The great fluidity of the brush work again points to the last decade of Turner's working life. A similar painting is in the Tate Gallery, London.

16. HEIDELBERG c.1840-42

Oil on canvas 14½ x 20¼ in. (37 x 51.5 cm.)
LAST EXHIBITED: *Yale* (191)

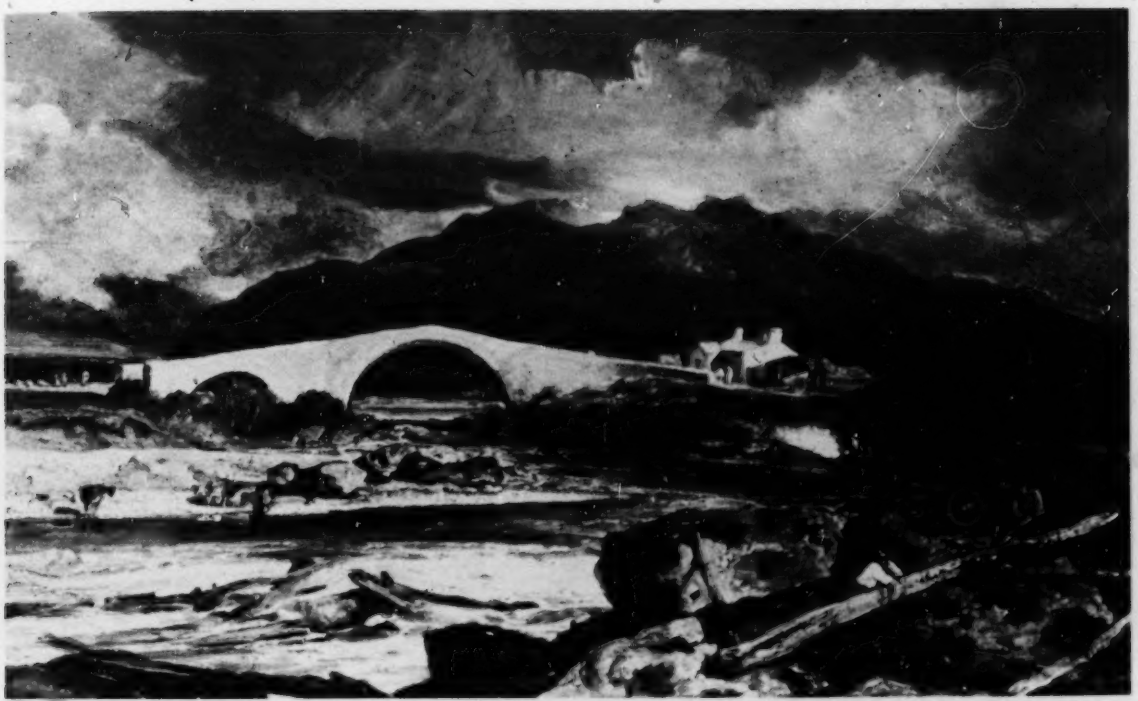
This also dates from his tour up the Rhine in 1840. The scene is from the far side of the Neckar looking across to the town with the castle above.

Illustrations

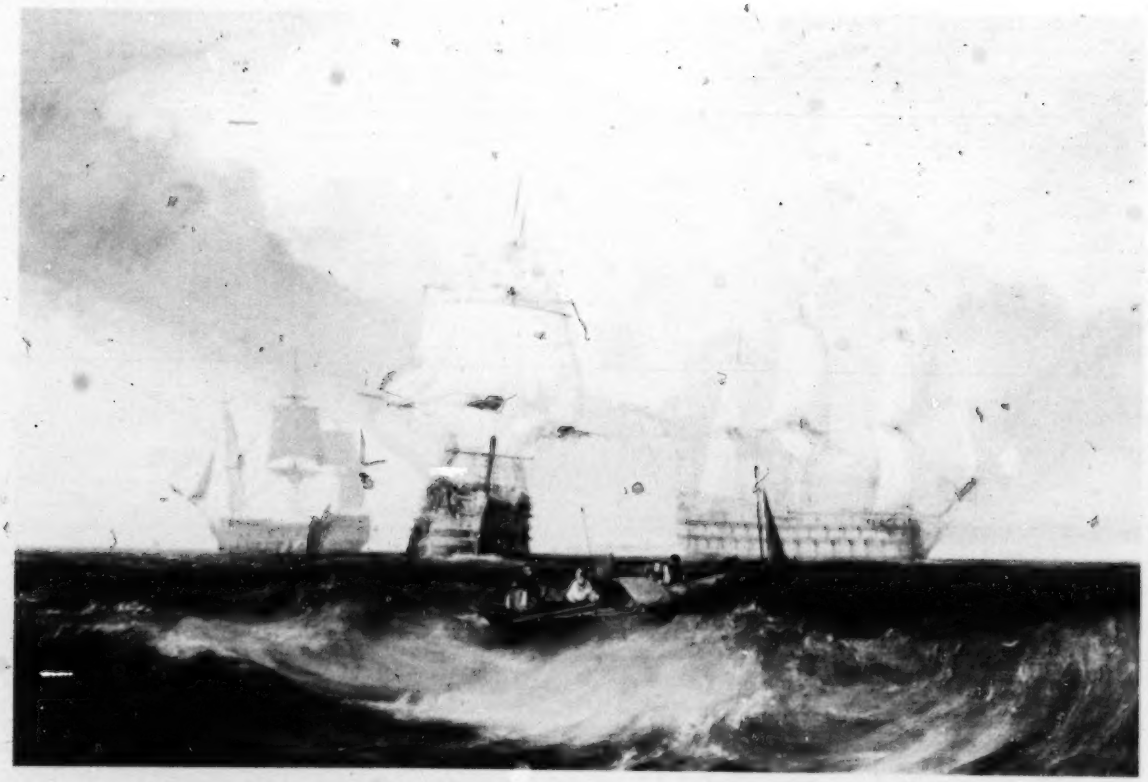
1 . *Bath Abbey, West Front, c.1797*
42 x 50 in.

2 · *The Lime Kiln at Coalbrookdale, c.1797–98*
11⅜ x 15⅞ in.

3 · *Harlech Castle, 1799*
34½ x 47 in.



4 · *Tummel Bridge, Perthshire, c.1802–5*
11 x 18¼ in.



5 · *The Victory Returning from Trafalgar, c.1806*
26 3/8 x 39 1/2 in.

6 · *Newark Abbey, 1807*
36 x 48½ in.

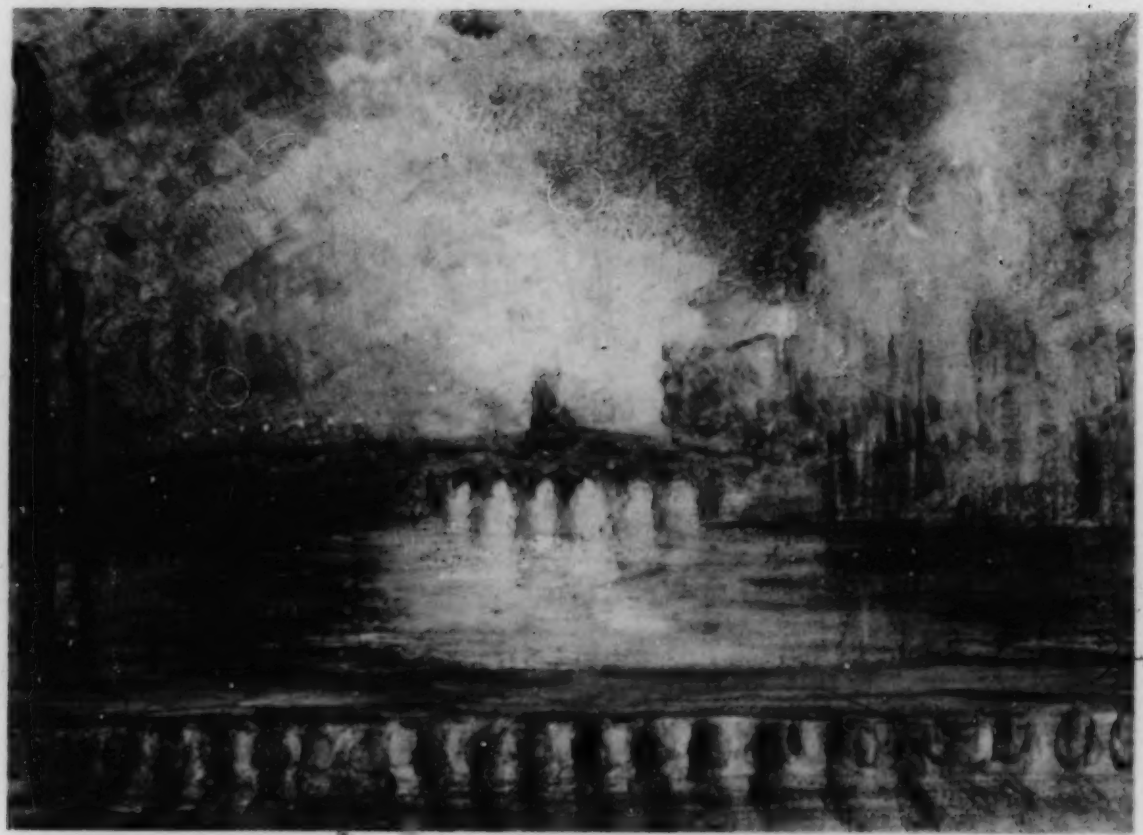
7 · *Lake Avernus: Aeneas and the Cumæan Sibyl, c.1813–15*
28¼ x 38¼ in.

8 · *Mountainous Landscape with Lake and Figures, c.1820–25*
16 x 24½ in.

9 · *The Sketch for "Mountainous Landscape with Lake and Figures", c.1820–25*
7⅝ x 11⅝ in.

10 · *Dort or Dordrecht: The Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam Becalmed, 1818*
62 x 92 in.

11 · *Port Ruysdael, 1827*
36¾ x 48¼ in.

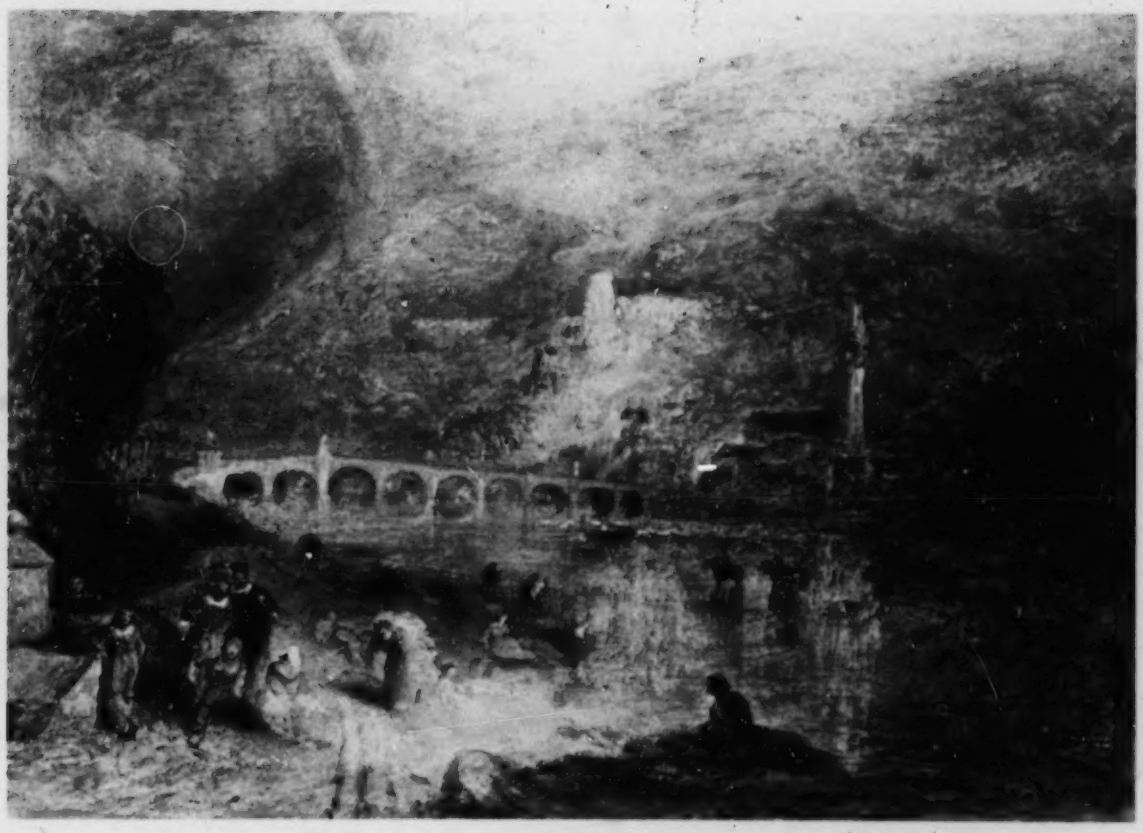


12 · *The Burning of The Houses of Parliament, 1834*
5½ x 7½ in.

13 · *River Landscape with a Castle, c. 1838–42*
33 3/4 x 44 1/4 in.

14 · *Monte Rosa, c.1840*
36 x 48 in.

15 · *Stormy Sea Breaking on a Shore, c.1840*
17½ x 25 in.



16 · *Heidelberg, c.1840-42*
14½ x 20¼ in.